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Is Mondale A Security Risk?

By John Lofton

Managing Editor - Washington Weekly

WASHINGTON — President Carter is said to be worried that as the SALT II debate heats up U.S. intelligence secrets will leak and this might damage the country's national security. He warns: "We will be sharing with Congress some of our most sensitive defense and intelligence secrets. And the leaders in Congress must ensure that these secrets will be guarded carefully."

Well, Mr. Carter's concern is commendable. But if the President is as worried about the leaking of secret information as he is said to be then perhaps he should order the FBI to place Vice President Walter Mondale under surveillance. Because, according to the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the Vice President, is attempting to sell the SALT II agreement, has publicly revealed military information that is classified.

On February 22 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, at a State Department-sponsored SALT-selling conference, the Vice President declared:

"Our military position today is secure and we are taking steps to assure that it remains secure. And a sound SALT agreement will make us stronger as a nation because it will contribute to that security." Calling U.S. military capabilities "enormous and growing," Mr. Mondale pointed out:

— That today the U.S. has "over 20,000 nuclear weapons;"

— That one U.S. Poseidon submarine "carries more than 140 warheads;"

— That the U.S. has "348 heavy bombers which can carry 2,000 megatons of total power;"

— That "three-quarters of the Soviet Union's warheads are on vulnerable fixed land-based missiles;"

— That "we are substantially improving our land-based-missile force;" and

— That "we are accelerating development of a new and much larger land-based missile — called the MX."

Okay, so what's the story? Are these assertions accurate? In order to try and find out I sent Mr. Mondale's statements to the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA). I did not however tell ACDA that the information I was seeking was information used by Vice President Mondale in a public address. Here's what Thomas Halstead, ACDA's public affairs adviser, told me in a letter dated April 28:

— Concerning Mondale statement number one, "this is classified information you are requesting and therefore no number of total U.S. nuclear weapons can be given you."

— Concerning Mondale statement number two, "For national security reasons, the precise number of warheads on a Poseidon SSBN cannot be divulged in an unclassified statement."

— Concerning Mondale statement number three, "The United States has more than 348 SALT-accountable heavy bombers, but approximately that number in the active inventory that are unit-equipped. For national security purposes, we cannot disclose the deliverable megatonnage of such bombers in an unclassified statement."

— Concerning Mondale statement number four, "While we cannot give exact estimates of warhead totals on Soviet ICBM's, due to national security considerations, your estimate is in the ballpark."

Now, in addition to using classified defense data in public speech, there is another problem with what Mr. Mondale is saying: some of his assertions are simply not accurate.

Concerning Mondale statement number five, ACDA's Halstead says: "Recent software improvements to the Minuteman III guidance systems did provide some accuracy improvement. However, no additional accuracy improvements for the Minuteman missile systems are presently being contemplated."

— Concerning Mondale statement number six, "Research and development for the MX are proceeding at a measured pace commensurate with